Caroline Cabading Interview Zoom Video Transcription

Filipino-American Jazz Music in the San Francisco Bay Area
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Interview 2: Caroline Cabading
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Moderator: Darleen Principe (Journalist, Lecturer at Cal State Northridge)
Additional Participants: Eleanor Lipat-Chesler (Independent Scholar, Ube Arte); Mary Talusan Lacancale (co-curator)

Transcription

Darleen
[00:00:00] Start at the beginning. How did you get started with jazz music?

Caroline
[00:00:01] Okay, jazz music, I think has a lot to do with where I was born and raised. So I am a fourth generation Filipino San Franciscan As a matter of fact, and I grew up in the neighborhood in San Francisco that is called the Harlem of the West, which is the Fillmore neighborhood of San Francisco, and this is where all of the jazz greats before my time actually this is the 1940s and 1950s, they all came and they were performing at the nightclubs there. So that's almost like my heritage and my family's heritage. Even though I was born decades later, we understood we came from an R&B and jazz village. So, when I was a kid, you know, just getting introduced to the music that I liked you know within my cohort, my uncles would say, well first of all they noticed that I liked to sing. I was also a flute player, so they would try to steer me in a certain direction by introducing me to the greats of music, as the Filipino American community in particular and African American community understood it to be. Earth, Wind, & Fire, Rose Royce, Phyllis Hyman, Chaka Khan, and then jazz, so like so that also got introduced to me as what was my heritage of where I came from, where I was born and raised in that particular village of San Francisco. So, I took to it, I took to R&B and Soul and the very deep levels that don't even exist in pop bands that you wouldn't know about. Saw my own people doing it, there are some amazing R&B, jazz, and jazz musicians that come from San Francisco so it was actually, I felt that I could go there. I had the role models and the music is off the hook especially if you have uncles that are teaching you how to listen to it properly.

Darleen
[2:06] Yeah and you said you kind of touched on another question that I had about the geography. I mean, you know, one of the interesting things is kind of doing research on this with San Francisco [which] has such a robust jazz scene, but also kind of a Filipino American jazz

scene that has been putting on festivals right for the past decade or so. I mean, so what elements make San Francisco…like why did that Filipino American jazz scene emerge in San Francisco?

Caroline
[00:02:43] Yeah, I hate to say this but as how some beautiful things emerge, it's because of racism, I mean, to be quite honest with you. We, as Filipino people, and as Japanese American people, we were allowed in racist America, or even pre civil rights America to live in certain areas. You could have money in your hand, you could have cash money, and the mainstream or the Anglo community would not allow you to live there. And right now, if you were to come to San Francisco, with all of our beautiful Victorians in the Western tradition, and how it's so gentrified. This is like prime real estate, but when my family was there this was called the ghetto. This was the western addition was-my church this Sacred Heart church was-you know how you always have like a church and then there's the community center that's like right next to the church. Our Community Center was the hangout, one of the secret hangouts for the Black Panthers. So that's, that's where I come from. So, this was definitely very inner city, no white people wanted to live there. When my family first came there that was why you had Japanese people living there, you had black people living there, you had Filipino people living there. And when you're living there all together, you're either going to, I guess, fight or you're going to figure out that you are common in, in how the mainstream disenfranchises you. And luckily for my family and my community, we believe that we were in a common struggle, or a common experience and the best way to deal with that is that we became more like family. So, I came from a household in which there were, you know, even at a time when Filipino people had issues with Japanese people because of World War Two. Japanese American kids were hanging out at our house…African American...there was none of that that was happening around the Philippine immigrant experience because we saw that our experience was different. And so those kinds of friendships, develop deep friendships, even like inner marriage kinds of like deep relationships, and that's where I think that for Filipinos the connection to the R&B and jazz world came from because this is African American music, and we were lucky enough to be a part of that village, and that specific village of the Fillmore. Filipinos have lived everywhere in San Francisco, Manilatown, Daly City, you know, that type of thing. My family came from that particular area where we related deeply to Japanese Americans and African Americans. They were like family.

Darleen
[00:05:31] Knowing the scene well, is this happening elsewhere? Is anything like it happening elsewhere that you know of?

Caroline
[00:05:39] I wouldn't know. I mean my heritage in many ways like if you go back to like the great jazz singers of the Filipino American experience like Jo Canion, and then her daughter's Third Wave. And then I would probably be like another generation. There's been generations of jazz female vocalists that have actually, you know, come up and then there's all the men, you know like, Flip Nuñez and all of that, but then me I look at my lineage as female singer, and there's lineage there already. Then we were very blessed to have kulintang, you know, our

traditional Philippine, and we had a master artists that lived here. I instantly fell in love because that's some funky music. We come from funky polyrhythm music and you know, that is our natural state. That is our DNA state, and then jazz which is also about funk and soul and rhythm. So for me, both of those things created like the Filipino American jazz aesthetic for me or the potentiality for it. And because the teacher lived here, I'm also a descendant of that lineage with say kulintang arts who first thought of the fusion of tribal Philippine rhythms with jazz. So, I believe that it happened because of who was here, it happened because Filipinos in San Francisco related very strongly to the African American community as if we were family as opposed to the interesting racism that, let's face it exists even within the Filipino community. Then also kulintang made its way here. Whether it has happened, anywhere else, I don't know actually, but those elements were here in this particular part of America and the world.

Darleen
[00:7:38] Right. And that was actually a question that I had for you is that, I mean it's interesting just as fourth generation you said Filipino San Franciscan. You talk to other later generation FilAms and they have a harder time kind of discovering routes and things like that and connections, and fourth generation that's a way. So, is it mostly the geography that was your entry point into kulintang or how, how did that come about was it just being around it?

Caroline
[00:08:22] Yeah and you know and what's interesting too is that in order to keep my, my learning, honest, because you know I could be here an American saying like, oh yeah I know about kulintang or whatever. I need to go back every year to study with my masters there because otherwise you're not you're not keeping up your chops and you're not being honest about like you know where it really comes from. When I talk to my Manila friends who are like jazz musicians and stuff, they're fascinated by this fusion of jazz and kulintang. It hasn't even occurred to the motherland. That is the home of kulintang, or the Kalinga or the Cordillera tribal rhythms, which I'm also studying. I find that fascinating too, so that for them that's like wow, you're doing that I would never have seen that, would never have thought that could even exist. So, it is interesting that it's happening. It happened in the San Francisco Bay Area, or California. I think that happened because of the exposure to see the linkages. Like if you are doing R&B and jazz and then you are doing kulintang, this is not gamelan. It has a different, and gamelan is beautiful, this is not Cambodian gong music. This is not Thai Gong music. It's a different more syncopated improvisational music, it would almost take an improv and jazz is the essence of that improvisation or personal expression. With kulintang, there's some protocol, but there's lots of room for personal expression. Mary you may know this too. When you think about it, there may only be about seven or eight actual songs in the repertoire, but all the variations, create hundreds of songs. Songs that are such variations you think you're listening to two different songs, but it's just like variation number 50 of Sinulog a Kamamatuan. In the same way that someone could see "Misty" as written all the way to "Moody's Mood," or "I'm in the Mood for Love (the original)," and then "Moody's Mood," which became a completely different song in jazz. So, that is really what kulintang music is. It *is* jazz. So, if you were in that sitting that place like me and you saw them both as being similar, well then they can actually be living together. So, for me, that's how

that happened. Kulintang, how I got introduced to it was a different story. I was, I was a docent at the Exploratorium and one of the things that we had were performances sometimes. I was an R&B musician, all that kind of stuff. I knew I didn't relate too much to the Rondalia music It's beautiful, but it seemed very colonial to me. I was assigned [to be] the station manager of this Filipino Gong musician that was coming in. So, I'm over here sitting there, and it was like what my friend who was a Korean adoptee said when she first bit into a persimmon. She said I never had a persimmon, but I remembered this taste. I almost want to cry right now. But when I heard kulintang it was like, I've never heard this before, but I remember this.

Darleen
[00:11:38]
Yeah, kind of like an ancestral sort of memory.

Caroline
[00:11:42]
That's how the next thing was, how do I study this and that, and that was all luck, coincidence that I was in this place at this time, and on jazz, I was born in this community at this time.

Darleen
[00:11:55] The music spoke to you. Was your family very musical?

Caroline
[00:12:04] Um, my family? My grandmother, who I was named after, was a singer. I come from very creative people but she's probably the person who was the singer, and no one was a professional musician though. Kulintang was the first exposure to my family when they first heard it from me, that they had ever heard of it as well. And sometimes the journeys are like that and luckily my family did not squash my interest in all of this. They let me. Okay, go ahead and explore it, you know.

Darlene
[00:12:40] So, with your quintet the Autonomous Region, you founded that in 2015,

Caroline
[00:12:45] I believe so, yes.

Darlene
[00:12:47] I know that you do performing, you perform kind of classic, modern jazz, American jazz favorites and then you also combine with the, I mean, kind of developed your own genre really. Right? You call it Kuljazz

Caroline
[00:13:00] Kuljazz but I would like to say is that it's the Filipino American jazz aesthetic because I'm not the first one to explore it. Let's just say it's my contribution. Like when you see Brazilian

jazz or Afro Cuban jazz there are there are kinds of jazz songs and feels that come from a culture. I'm not the first to feel that there's a Filipino American jazz aesthetic, but let's say that it's my take on it. So, I don't want to claim it. But then it is like, because really, it's kulintang jazz so I call it like Kuljazz because it's a play on words. You know, cool jazz and the album and all that type of thing. *The Birth of Cool*

Darlene
[00:13:49] When I was looking it up, I liked that you spelled it with the K-U-L as well. If you were to describe Kuljazz and how it's different from other forms of jazz, how would you describe that to someone who might not know?

Caroline
[00:14:04] Sure. When you think about jazz when it comes to those other forms like if you're saying, Latin jazz, Afro Cuban jazz, Bossa Nova; the chord structure doesn't change, the song does not change it's still "Manha de Carnival" or it's "Misty" or it's "My Favorite Things." The only thing that changes is that there is a rhythmic feel that is a cultural feel. There is a feel that feels like Brazil, there is a feel that feels like a deeper Afro Cuban. So that's the that's the way that I would say that the music changes for Filipino American jazz, for me. I know some people they also do Filipino American jazz could be the standards, translated to Tagalog. I have seen people say that as well. But for me, the underneath rhythm is a tribal rhythm. Mary, it would be like underneath, I could be playing the Maranao rhythm underneath it. I could be playing the binalig rhythmic bit underneath that and then you're soloing or you're putting melody on top. That's sort of like how I'm translating what could be a Filipino American jazz aesthetic. There is tribal rhythmic motifs, and a bed, a foundation, not the chord structure. That never changes with any of these other you know these other songs. It's always about the rhythmic feel, and I'm using our tribal rhythmic feel in Kuljazz.

Darleen
[00:15:36] The other members of your quintet are playing kind of the traditional instruments or the traditional American

Caroline
[00:14:44] It's true and they're playing it in response to the rhythmic bed. I think that I showed you that little slideshow, which was like everything else, crammed in there. There was like kulintang thrown in there and then Kuljazz and then there was just straight jazz. And then there was the International Hotel slides right. It's the middle part which was the Kuljazz part, it's like they are definitely responding to the rhythmic feel of the binalig in that song and to the limits of what they can do chordally. The agongs and the kulintang are fixed. We can't change it to different keys and stuff like that. They're the fixed structures. So, the other instruments, the Western instruments they take the lead off of the Philippine instruments. They have to fit into the nooks and crannies.

Darleen

[00:16:43] Yeah, that's kind of a fun puzzle I would imagine.

Caroline
[00:16:46] Yeah and I like that the lead is Philippine because I think that it's sort of enough that Filipinos in this in our lives, in our culture, [have] had to adapt. We're such great adapters. We've adapted to the Spanish. We have adapted to the Americans. We have adapted. When I decided that we were going to, as an ensemble, work on this…the Western instruments would adapt to us for a change.

Darleen

[00:17:13] You touched on race a little bit earlier. I think for people who don't know jazz or who aren't familiar with it, I think that the immediate association is, you know, black musicians or white musicians, right? I know that there are a lot of a lot of musicians like yourself, that are trying to kind of raise the profile of Filipinos and other Asian Americans in jazz. What would you say have been the challenges of that? Have there been any sort of tensions or backlash of having, or just any backlash that you faced trying to perform jazz.

Caroline
[00:18:00] The only backlash-and I don't think that- what's interesting about jazz music and it might be different with like pop or whatever. Jazz music is that, you know, in order for you to even be in love with it you should be at a certain musical level that it becomes…and if you understand that this is African music. This is African American music. Came from Africa, it got fused with Western music in America. And that is its roots, if you honor that and you respect that you don't try to take that away from the African American experience and you understand that you are contributing to that and that you are always still contributing to an African American music. If you start from that, with respect, and you try your best to be the best musician you can be without any excuses, the jazz world tends to embrace you, because it's almost like you're paying your dues. Now if you don't pay your dues. If you're doing something sort of half assed or you're just trying to call it jazz or whatever or you're trying to claim for your own as a non-African person- that I created this or something like that and you're not paying your respects to where this music, what its roots are- there might be some issues around that. So, is there an issue with Filipinos in jazz? I would say no if they sitting you know at the (plate). Who I work with and who my mentors are, they have been very fluid within the jazz world. It becomes colorblind at that point when we're talking about music. As long as it's coming from a place of respect and you're understanding where the roots of this music [are]. Just like someone coming into kulintang. You know, if you're going to be coming in, you're just playing our gongs or something like that, you better pay respect as to where this came from, because we face that as well. There's a lot of non-Filipinos that come in, nothing wrong with that, but then don't you turn around and you sort of like claim it as your own. You start banging on gongs without any respect for where this came from. But if you do come in with respect. There have been many non-Filipino kulintang players that came in knowing where it comes from and they know how to respect it in that way. So in terms of jazz, and Asians or Filipinos. Especially Filipinos because, you have to

understand, Filipinos have been very much able to relate with the African American community since the get go. I can't speak for other Asian groups but like I said we've intermarried. This is family, so I've never had an issue with that, Filipinos and African American people. Then when it comes down to just playing quality, anyone who chooses to go in this music. The only thing that has become more of an issue is sex. So, a female walks into the situation, and especially if you're singer, they wouldn't look at me as a composer, or a percussionist or something like that. Their first thought is chick singer. So, as a woman, I have needed to step up and establish myself as a musician and not just a singer. *That*. Here's the thing. My God, I guess it's going to be archived, but I'll say it. Not all women rise to the plate. As with some stereotypes it's like that sometimes because some singers did not learn how to read music, some female singers did not learn how to count in time. They don't know how to speak the vocabulary. So, with that, you know stereotype or that judge a book by its cover situation; I think a female has to step up and do the work that she needs to do to, to say no, I'm a musician. In my opinion, once you establish that, then you can work with men.

Darleen
[00:22:20] So that's how you overcome it. To become a master of the craft of the art

Caroline
[00:22:25]
You need to be a musician, not just a singer. Yeah, and you need to do all that you need to do just like any instrumentalist. How they have to study their craft and you're correct, exactly. Then, in my opinion, I've seen that that kind of prejudice went away because it did start like that when I was younger, you know, I was patronized.

Darleen
[00:22:50] Another question. How has it changed? How has the scene changed in the past ten, fifteen, twenty years?

Caroline
[00:22:57] In San Francisco. Sadly, it's become a buyer's market. And with COVID, even more so because now none of us can go and, you know, and perform but say in my grandfather's day, there was a strong music union. The union is not strong anymore, so you get, and it's a buyer's market, there's a lot of talent in California, there's a lot of talent in the San Francisco Bay area. This talent, we were born to perform, and many are desperate to perform. So you can be in some clubs, where as a visitor you're coming in, it looks swanky, it's beautiful all this kind of stuff. You're paying a lot of money for drinks and food, but you don't know that the musician, the trio is probably getting forty dollars for all of them for playing three to four sets, and they still have to pay for their drinks. That is how I would say it probably changed, it's a buyer's market. It is hard for particularly jazz musicians because we're not the big popular kind of music to make a living. There are people that are bordering on genius that are barely surviving or they die in semi poverty. That's the nature of jazz in general.

Darlene
[00:24:26] Oh, how do we get over that? I mean what's the way forward with that? How do we make it better?

Caroline
[00:24:33] Well, first and foremost, it would be like, it would start with the clubs, like they would have to have some sense. What they always say is they need to make a profit and Lord knows who knows with COVID what that means now. But back pre COVID, it was like, well, we need to make a profit and we just can't afford to pay musicians more than we can pay them. What would happen would be some sort of crazy combination of club owners and restaurants finding value in this and saying no, I'm going to pay musicians what they deserve and musicians not backstabbing each other by saying if someone says I'm worth a hundred dollars for two sets, and another person go I'll do it for twenty. You see what I mean? It would have to be like, we need to stop doing that to each other. It would be that combination which is a difficult combination. The thing about it is that I've been able to work with that around my own jazz ensemble because that's my job. Also, my kulintang ensemble, but your average musician just wants to play. They are artists, they are not businessmen and businesswomen. As a matter of fact, the art of negotiation is, it hurts. It's sort of like it's embarrassing. I think particularly for Asians or Filipinos to be saying I think I'm worth more. That's not easy. I think as a people, especially our immigrant people, we're used to just thank you. Thank you, I have a job. Thank you, I have an opportunity. So, it would take a lot of change of your consciousness to say I would rather not work than work for something that is beneath me. My teacher, Danny Kalanduyan was one of the people that taught me about that. As I was raised with him for decades on being a kulintang player, he was my model of, then we just won't take the gig if you want us for nothing because we know what our worth is. So, I was raised a certain way with that teacher and what I've done with the jazz music is that I actually use that standard for my band too. I think I know what we're worth.

Darleen
[00:27:06] Have you have you been able to perform even virtually through this whole pandemic?

Caroline
[00:27:13] Actually, we're hoping to get back into our center so that we can livestream in June, but San Francisco is pretty firm about what is an essential business. (Our governor will) Actually that's good news for all of us because our governor, on Monday, plans to talk about the guidelines for museums, performing spaces and production companies to open up which means hopefully that soon arts organizations can open up. So, we've been doing a lot of practicing and creating on demand programming from home. Then showing it to like in this situation it's like okay, can you hear the sound pretty good from where you guys are at? Across town? So, we feel strong, but we won't know until we're in the space and we're actually projecting out into the people again. It's interesting because you would have to get five musicians to feel good about each other again and trusting each other to get back into space. After you've been sheltered in

space just because you open it up doesn't mean that issues of safety are dispelled, right? So, we're going to find out and hopefully, we do agree all five of us are like actually, and it's five on both sides. You have kulintang and jazz, we're jumping out of our skin. These were art forms that were not meant to be painted in isolation. So hopefully in June we're going to get that opportunity. Hypothetically, we have it all mapped out, but that's hypothetically because we haven't done it.

Darleen
[00:28:56] I hope it works out. I wanted to go back a little bit to the fusion aspect. Filipino Americans, we're kind of experiencing a little bit of a renaissance I think right now. We're seeing more Filipino Americans kind of become more visible and in a whole bunch of cultural spaces. Actually when I was looking into what you do and watching your videos, one of the questions that came to me was…it made me think of some of the Filipino American chefs right now who are cooking and some of the things that they're doing in this in this attempt to appeal to a mainstream American palate. They're taking these dishes that are rooted in Filipino food and adapting them. After talking to some of them, they say, yeah people love it, but it's almost like we're getting backlash almost from the Filipinos. From the Philippines. They're not happy and they don't like that we're calling this Filipino food. I was curious about whether by fusing kulintang and jazz, have you gotten any backlash from other Filipinos about doing that? Or any criticisms?

Caroline
[00:30:30] That's a great question and I think the reason why I would say no is because I really keep the two segments very separated. Kultura Kapwa is straight traditional. The community knows and my teachers know that I go back home. When I started studying Kalinga music in particular, I asked my teacher, Do I have the right? Do I have the blessing to teach this? If he said no, then I would have been fine with just learning it and having that in my heart. I think that for American Filipinos you do need to respect that, you need to know that you are a visitor. You you are not born into this culture. It is their birthright. Kulintang, the Kalinga Gangsa, all of that type of thing. They were born into it, they heard it all their lives, and they are the only ones that are worthy of being called a master. Danongan Kalanduyan was worthy of being a master. He learned this on his own his mother's knee, and he lived in the village. He learned it from the masters there. No matter how much I study this music, I will never be a master and I should not be one. In the same way that I could never claim that jazz was anything other than African American music. We just need to understand the respect right from there. I will always be a visitor and I will always be a student. The more I get deeper into these cultures, the more humble I become. When I do my traditional work, it is very careful, and it is with blessing. Here's the thing, when I do the jazz, I claim a different culture. I am an American. I'm four generations an American. My family taught me early on, as part of my strength building is that anyone who tries to tell you are not an American you got to tell them different. You got to prove it. That is your birthright. That is my birthright. One of the only art forms that truly comes from America is jazz. So my spin on it is that I am an American and it is my birthright to claim jazz. What I'm doing is actually bringing in the rhythmic motifs of my ancestry to create a different variation of jazz. I'm

not saying I'm changing kulintang. I'm saying I'm enhancing jazz. When I speak like that most people don't have an issue with it, including Filipinos because I'm not claiming to evolve kulintang or Gangsa. I am simply saying I'm a jazz musician and I'm bringing this in. What you are hearing is jazz music not kulintang music. When I say that, Philippine people, if they were to criticize me and I haven't met them yet. I would say I'm not creating Philippine music; I am creating a different tribe music. That tribe is Filipino American. We do have to claim that. That is a unique tribe, especially someone like me, who is a Ilocano and Visayan. If you go back home, those are distinct cultures. There's a lot of mixture like that. My husband is Kapampangan. What would a child of ours possibly be at that point? Filipino American. It couldn't claim any of those three cultures. We need to hold that in our hearts that we come from a certain history, a certain struggle. Our hearts also come from a certain ancestry, but our struggle in our history and our contribution to America is unique. So, we are also a tribe, and that tribe has its own culture, its own theater, its own music, its own visual art, its own literature. So, what I'm doing is the music of the Filipino American tribe. I claim, nothing more than that. I dare anyone to say that I don't, because that is my tribe.

Darleene
[00:34:51] If you were if you were to kind of think what you do. The music that you make. What is the impact of the music that you make on the FilAm tribe? The FilAm community.

Caroline
[00:35:06] Hopefully, it actually brings them back to a sense of, their empowered roots. No culture has been more colonized. No culture has been adapted so well. That's part of our strength as well but sometimes we forget that we came from warriors. We came from strength. Ee came from our own beautiful indigenous music. So, I represent a cultural center as well. A part of what I get grant funding for is to actually teach and expose the music. I get this mostly from the kulintang music because that is where people don't know the roots. When they see this they say, Oh my God, I come from this? They might be like me too that as beautiful as it is, you might not have quite related to the Rondalla. To the costuming that looked very European, that maybe seemed like not quite what your heart was resonating at. You were like me that instead you heard these rhythms and that felt like something you saw the attire and you're going; Oh I could see that Island people wore that. I can see that now. I can see that that could be what our regalia was. So, for me, it's usually about the impact and the transformation on faces and young faces and old faces and everyone else. It's that wow, you know you reminded me or introduced me to the power that we come from. That we don't have to be like somebody else. We're great at being somebody else. We are the best imitators. The excellence of the Filipino people especially their artistry, we are so excellent at that. We are influenced by so many things, but we don't have to be just that. We don't have to necessarily just show how great we are in being like the mainstream, or what is popular. We could also show that we come from something amazing in its own right and you stand, and you walk in this country with that foundation. And so, for me, that's been the biggest impact. When children say this. When parents say this. When even older people just said thank you for reminding me or showing me what we come from. We come from empowerment.

Darleen [00:37:36]
Speaking of that, I have a couple last questions for you. This power of art, to be able to connect generations, and to connect just people in different locations. This ability to do that. It's really amazing that art has that power. But in terms of, you know, kind of touching again on the aspect of this is making art for the Filipino American tribe. We can strengthen our tribe, but how do we reach beyond that and try to increase education and increase cultural understanding among other ethnic groups or the mainstream right here in America, how do we do that?

Caroline
[00:38:25] Well, I'll tell you one of the things that I'm doing because it's one thing for your people to find power in it. It's another thing to sort of like expose this to other cultures, to show that this is the human experience. This music and this dancing [are] the human experience but just simply just sort of seeing through the colored glasses of the Filipino history and stuff like that and how they develop it. This is also you. So, in that sense, we are no different from you. That could be the way that harassment and racism can somehow disappear. Especially if we get that at a very young age. We show the beauty of what our culture is, and we also see the beauty of Latino culture and we also see the beauty of African culture. We feel that this could also be something that resonates with us. That we are this international family and we get that message at a very young age, as part of the educational system. That goes a long way too. Me growing up in a diverse city and having a family coming over to dinner with all kinds of colored people coming through. And white people too. Our home, our dinner table was like open to everybody. You grow up like that. Thinking that everybody is like just family. That's how you get rid of racism because there is no other. There is no people that are different from you and that you have to hate.

Caroline
[00:40:00] So for Kultura Kapwa, what we do is we work very closely with the Unified School District. And we actually bring in assembly programs, workshops, and residencies that are educational in nature. So, it's not just a performance which you're wowed by, but we're actually talking about the cultural context of this music and this dancing because actually, in tribal culture, art, what we see as art is not simply entertainment. It is the socialization tool that is used in the community to teach the community and remind the community, what our values are. So, everything from what we're wearing to the relationship of the instruments to what a song might mean or what a dance might mean, almost everything goes back to what is valued in its highest level of being a decent human being in this village, in this culture. So, without even knowing it, a young person grows up, understanding how to be a decent human being in a Maguindanaoan village, or in a Mabilong village, or in the Cordilleras. So, we try to bring that into the schools, and we go this is why we wear what we wear, this is why the song is like this. This is why we rotate the instruments. This is why sometimes you're seeing a dancer who's also playing an instrument. All of this is actually a part of what is valued in the community. There are no audiences [or] someone on a great pillar who's better than everybody else [and] performing for everybody else. Everyone's a performer. Everyone is audience. It's beautiful, actually. It's something that we should be able to do here in America and we explain that component to

children. It also tells them art is your birthright. This is how another country sees the role of art. All you can really do, I think in many ways, if you can think about the global, it becomes too much. How am I going to change the world? You put yourself in a spin and then you ended up accomplishing nothing. All I can do is my ensemble, doing the work that I think I can do and my cultural center, doing the work that I think I can do. So I provide that training for anyone who is interested for free at Manilatown. Then in our Unified School Districts providing that education, workshops, and residencies if schools are wanting to go there. Actually, schools are wanting to go there. You'll be surprised at how accessible, kulintang is. Before the shelter in place we were actually having a lot of engagements. What we're excited about though, is that with virtual programming. Maybe now we can actually reach everybody. So that's the lemonade out of lemons or the blessing in the situation. Not only can Mother Nature now take a deep healthy breath, and possibly, ironically, global warming can be affected in a positive way, simply because we're now not out there in the world harming it. In that same way this unfortunate situation could make…I could be teaching children in LA or Boston. That's exciting to me. You know what I mean.

Darleen
[00:43:28] I was actually going to ask you how you envision the future for cultural work like this?

Caroline
[00:43:28] That's the blueprint that I want to do in June. It would be a combination of like, footage of like, amazing footage that you have already and then zoom with a high-quality camera or something. Where you have the demonstration and when we're allowed even a zoom camera on the ensemble playing and being able to talk to the students still. We're not there physically in your school, but we can come very close to that.

Darleen
[00:44:08]
It'll expand the village.

Caroline
[00:44:13]
And maybe even to the Philippines, right? Because when I visit my friends in the Philippines, they find us very fascinating, but I'm always coming over as one person. So, I can't really demonstrate to them a live Filipino Kuljazz performance. I could show them some clips or whatever. But it's like I could say I could call my friends and say we're doing a concert on Friday, live stream it. Even that music, we're excited about having accessible.

Darleen
[00:44:46] I have one last question for you. What advice do you have for someone who really is seeking to make an impact with their art?

Caroline
[00:44:58] With their art? If they're seeking to make an impact. Well really, excellence in some ways if you're like an activist artist like say, where I sort of semi am. There's a lot. If you are a person of color or woman or something like that, and you feel like accessibility has been an issue. Excellence often times has been a combination of anger plus mastery. You put that warrior spirit together with mastery, not warrior spirit with the world owes me a living or mastery but your just sort of being lazy. You know, if you have some fire under that because you feel that you're not getting enough opportunity, put your anger and mastery though, do your exercises, paint your paint, [and] write your words. You know what I mean? You do that. You do your homework. You become just as excellent as the mainstream artists. And you feel and you take that anger and you put that into the energy of becoming excellent. I don't think that someone can really hold you back. I really don't.

Darleen
[00:46:09] That's the recipe.

Caroline
[00:46:10] Yeah, I think so. And mastery.

Darleen
[00:46:14] And recipe. Well, I think, you know, we covered all of my questions. But is there anything else that I didn't ask you about that you think you feel is important that you want to talk about? Or say?

Caroline
[00:46:27] The only thing I have to say is that, you know, it's an interesting world and you guys were affected by grants too. I sit on a grant panel for a fund that is trying to stabilize the Soma? in San Francisco. It was one of these things where tribal philosophy sort of like came into American philosophy. So, they were over here looking at a bunch of up and coming Philippine artists and making judgments about them. About, well do they deserve $2,000? I remember every time I stayed with the village people when I was visiting the provinces, there is [was] not that kind of judgment around elder councils and around community. One of the things that I think is awful is that even though I'm a part of that world, I'm actually a very effective grant writer. It is a very funny thing in which you're pitting artists, against artists, for limited funds, and someone on the outside is determining whether you are truly a worthy artist. And that's heartbreaking. That's heartbreaking. Because you know, my opinion and if I go you go back to the tribal lands, you are born knowing where your heart resonates, and no one should be in judgment of that. So um, so one of the things that I suggested in that I'm trying to think now during times of COVID is that if someone is a brother or sister and they feel they're an artist...Why are we going to be like all the other funders? Put them in judgment and have them pitting against each other? Is there enough money, if they identify being Filipino and they also have a dream, could we give everybody

$2,000 and as a Filipino organization show that we believe in them? If they are not quite there, can we say, we're going to give you the money? And we're going to connect you with an artist that might help bring you up? Can we be different? And that that's sort of like what I'm thinking? How does the Filipino community help our artists? That would be how the tribes would do it. They don't do this judgment. It's not like, "Nope, not good enough." It's like, anyone can play kulintang. No one's going to say, you suck or something like that, or that you could quit. We need to bring these tribal philosophies into our communities as Filipino Americans because they're beautiful philosophies. I'm also bringing back the elder council instead of an advisory board in my organization, so the advisory board is gone. And it's now an elder council like the tribes for two reasons. In the tribes, you are in an elder council because you have lived enough years, you know the community and you are deserving and because we value you as an elder to make decisions about the community, and also, you are raised to think that in your elder years, you are at your best brain. Over here, we relegate our elders to sort of like become toddlers, again. The elder council was, for me, to honor their eldership and to also challenge them. It's like, instead of reverting back into your aches and pains and everything like that, and seeing how much you cannot do, I have faith in your brain being able to lead our community. We need to take those kinds of standards, almost like bring tribal philosophy back into Filipino American ways of doing things. Let's help all of our young people that want to be artists. Everyone wins. You know? Let's value our elders and remind them that they should rise to the occasion because that is also their birthright.

Darleen
[00:50:24] That's such a great insight. I feel like we could have a whole conversation about that as well. Yeah, thank you so much. Thank you. Eleanor, Mary, I don’t know if you want to jump in on anything, or ask anything?

Mary
[00:50:41] You have articulated some really, really kind of deep thoughts. Questions, I mean, that, you know, see, I can't even do it now. I mean, you were able to put into words, some really complex and complicated issues in our community. I really want to thank you for that. And, I mean, I have so many questions. I don't know if now was the time to bring some things up. But if we are, I'm kind of focusing this on Filipino American jazz. Could you name some artists, that say if I were a student and I wanted to know more about that particular topic, could you name some artists that I could do research on and look for?

Caroline
[00:51:32] I’m going to actually chat. In terms of female jazz vocalist; and here's the funny thing, these are all standard jazz vocalists. So, Jo Canion is like (? sound is hard to hear due to wind)... And then Third Wave. And then for jazz, and these again are classic jazz musicians. Flip Nuñez. I'll try to think of like other things too but google him, he's a big one. Now this is not kulintang jazz. And then if we're talking about fusion, we are talking about (Kulintang-sound rough) I do have to say that. This would be like the start of where you would be. The thing about it is that one does need to pay our respect to Filipinos that did not try to turn it tribal, but they

just kicked ass [laughter]. We come from that t--? and then we're jazz musicians. I also want to waylay the criticisms about that. Saying, “Well, they play jazz, but they happen to be Filipino.” It ain't that simple. It's like I played with these cats and stuff like that. These are Filipino people in their heart, and it might not be reflected necessarily in the aesthetic of their music, but those are those are my teachers, right? Oh, and then of course, gosh, I better just put it in there Danongan Kalanduyan for kulintang, right? And then now who I feel is (the really who...) Bernard Ellorin because he is his inheritor. I wouldn't dare - he could kick ass - I can’t even get close to that, but that's, you know, you need to pay respect where respect is due. That's a start.

Mary
[00:53:27] Yeah, every time I hear Bernard play binalig I mean, I could just hear Danny's voice in it, which is not far from what they regularly do among the Maguindonao which is, you know, oh let me play the way my auntie played and then you remember that person in that moment .But just to get back to Filipino jazz because we could definitely talk about so many other things but I know that sometimes amongst Filipino American sort of artists or conversations around culture, there's always this question or this need to investigate a Filipino sound, Filipino aesthetic. What I think you said about, you know, there's not necessarily a Filipino aesthetic in what they're playing but nevertheless, they are definitely Filipino American. And I wonder if you could just maybe dig into that a little bit more. And what do you mean by that? Maybe it's not showing up in the aesthetics of the sound that they're playing. But what else makes it Filipino American?

Caroline
[00:54:45] Well the very fact that they are Filipino, that they claim it, that they live it with their families. Here's the thing too, some of these guys, men and women, were actually doing the rounds of the Filipino community. The christenings, the parties and stuff like that. This was integral. If you were to explore Filipino jazz, it's also that they contributed to all of these gatherings of the Filipino community. This was important to hear. It was important to hear the R&B, it was important to hear the jazz. It's not that they were living in the white world and pretending to not be Filipino. They were very much claiming it and they were living within the community. I guess for me, it's important that they're not denied and that because some people would say well if they're not actually coming from an aesthetic that's tribal they were just musicians that happen to have been Filipino. Again, I was trained by them, these are my kuyas too. They let me sit in when I was younger. They did bring me up, so everything that I do is kulintang jazz and feeling like I could be a bandleader. They brought me up as a daughter. That is Filipino. That is almost tribal more than I would see anywhere else. I don't necessarily see other cultures doing that necessarily in the way that Filipinos do. That they would find out you were a Filipino sister or brother, and they would take you under their wing. And that might not be reflected in the music, but it's reflected in how you were raised and brought up, I guess. Yeah. Yeah. Because they gave me my opportunities. They also schooled me, you know, because they will tell you when you're acting a fool as a musician. And that is also what family does if they treated you like family. And it was because you were Filipino. It wasn't just anybody they would take under the wing. You know, you knew that, you know, that they sort of saw you across the room. And that was like a young Filipino man who was trying to like, play the piano, and you

were a veteran bass player. And you were gonna give him a couple of opportunities. I've been given opportunity like that. I can't explain it any more than that, but they gave me that opportunity. They were family. They were my uncles. They were my kuyas. For younger ones that might be interested, in kulintang or jazz. I would be their Ate. Because I would make an extra point, even if they didn't fuse. If they just wanted to sing the standards, I would take that. There's something about that that is about the Filipino way that you take the young ones under your wing and you know that they're still your tribe. I can't say it better.

Mary
[00:57:46] Oh, that was beautiful. Thank you so much. Eleanor, do you want to [ask] some questions?

Eleanor
[00:57:53] I don't. I'm so grateful for your wisdom, your creativity. This is such an inspiring interview. It was literally feeling you know, chills and the hairs on my arms were going up with some of your insights and the spirit behind what you were saying. I'm grateful to be a witness to this day.

Darleen
[00:58:16] Yes, I was very, very inspired as well. It's amazing what you do and after getting to watch a lot of your videos too before talking to you, it blew me away and like just watching them and listening to your music. So, yeah, thank you for this conversation.

Mary
[00:58:37] Yeah, thank you so much, Caroline. I've had your Autonomous Region CD in my car for a long time. Since grad school.

Caroline
[00:58:46] When I was young and angry. How come you're not doing social consciousness m__ anymore? Well I go, well I got married and I got happy. I don't have that anger anymore. I'm sort of happy in the community now. So that was a stage. Thank you that you have that. _____ into the band.

Mary
[00:59:10] So yeah, it'll be worth a lot of money someday. But anyways, thank you so much, it was so beautiful to hear your story and I'm sure we'll be, you know, contacting you again, just to get some more. So, thank you.

Caroline
[00:59:27] Ladies this has been an opportunity to be connected. So, don't forget, I represent Manilatown and the San Francisco Filipinos and it's like if the lemonade out of lemons out of all of this is that it's a little bit easier now to be in a sisterhood or community beyond our borders. Call on me. Call on me. This has been just really wonderful to just be hanging out kind of thing

beyond like the project and if you need to be, you know, gathering in that sense to just sort of talk. To talk about struggle, to talk about challenges and stuff like that I'm happy to be a part of that because we do need to nurture that part of our culture in not being alienated from each other. And that we have resources that can help each other.

Mary
[01:00:22] Yeah, I mean, I would love to have a virtual kulintang conference. I haven't been able to make it up to the bay for a while now. So, anybody who wants to put one of those together, that would be great. Or maybe we should put it together Eleanor. Okay.

Caroline
[01:00:43] So call on me when you need me again, if there's any questions or anything like that. Was there anything that I need to do? Do I need a send a W-9 or any contract or anything around?

Eleanor
[01:00:54] I'm going to stop the recording for this portion.

KEYWORDS

PEOPLE
Jo Canion
Flip Nuñez
Danny/Danongan Kalanduyan
Bernard Ellorin

ETHNOLINGUISTIC GROUPS
Kalinga
Cordillera
Ilocano
Visayan
Kapampangan
Maguindanao
Kalinga
M__?

BANDS
Autonomous Region
Kultura Kapwa
Kulintang Arts
Third Wave

PLACES
Filmore Village
Sacred Heart Church
Manilatown
Daly City
SoMa (SoMa Pilipinas - South of Market neighborhood)

MUSICAL TERMS
kulintang
gamelan
Sinulog a Kamamatuan
Rondalla
Kuljazz
Maranao
Binalig
Agongs
Kalinga Gangsa

OTHER
Kuyas - older brothers (figurative)
Ate - older sister

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